Collectors' Knowledge: What Is Kept, What Is Discarded

Aufbewahren oder wegwerfen – Wie Sammler entscheiden

Edited by

Anja-Silvia Goeing, Anthony T. Grafton, and Paul Michel

With the assistance of

Adam Blauhut

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QUESTIONS FRAMING THE RESEARCH / FRAGEN AN DAS FORSCHUNGSGEBIET

Anja-Silvia Goeing, Anthony T. Grafton, Paul Michel

Libraries, archives, museums and their precursors—the *Wunderkammern* where works of art and nature were brought together—are today the pivotal storage places of 'authoritative, cumulative and trustworthy'[1] knowledge. Because they have developed their structures, wealth and access policies very slowly, they have come to be seen as models for notions of cultural memory in Western civilisations.[2] This process, however, has not been without ruptures and losses: many changes have taken place over time in collections of objects and texts, sometimes in ways that still shape the contents of today's collections.

In the present, libraries, archives and museums are undergoing a change of role. They are in the process of handing over many of their public access functions to internet databases. Objects are vanishing from the eyes of the public and transforming into data. But their images are more present than ever before. They often appear on the net in more than one copy, as if in a kaleidoscope—accessible, comparable with each other and easily corrupted.

Observing this change with Argus eyes, historians have come to re-evaluate the past. Discussions of material cultures have broadened within the humanities. Objects, their organisation and introduction into epistemology, the art and philosophy of knowledge, are debated not only by philosophers, ethnologists and historians of science, but also by political historians, art historians, educationalists and professors of literature. One effect has been the widespread effort to study public and private collections and their connections with knowledge cultures, which began in 1989 with the foundation of the *Journal of the History of Collections* at Oxford

[1] David Pearson, 'Introduction: From Texts to Collections', in *Libraries within the Library: The Origins of the British Library's Printed Collections*, ed. by Giles Mandelbrote and Barry Taylor, 1–10 (London: The British Library, 2009), 1. The author refers to libraries in general.

[2] Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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University Press.[3] Another project, which began taking shape in the early 1990s with publications by Lisa Jardine, Anthony Grafton, Richard Yeo, Ann Blair and Helmut Zedelmaier, was connected to book cultures and note-taking practices. Scholars scrutinised the entries in encyclopaedias, marginal notes and so-called commonplace books that structured and restructured reading practices. The authors investigated individual collections of material, both ancient and contemporary.[4]

In late medieval and early modern Europe, the more public access to knowledge was restricted, the more its acquisition and validation became an individual affair. Intellectuals who were themselves wealthy, or who served rich and powerful people, usually had the deepest impact not only on ways of reading, but also on practices of buying, copying, exchanging and in many cases collecting objects that had to do with enhancing or challenging opinions and beliefs. Reading, note-taking and writing books were only part of this very material business. A striking example is the demand for building up scholarly libraries in the aftermath of the established printing presses. In his *Pandectae* of 1548, Konrad Gessner reprinted at the beginning of each of his five chapters book lists that foreign publishers had sent to him.[5] The books printed at the shops of Christian Wechelius in Paris and Johannes Gymnicus in Cologne had marked prices. The longest list, by Sebastian Gryphius of Lyon, included more than three hundred titles, organised in scholarly disciplines: some books were written

[3] http://jhc.oxfordjournals.org (accessed 30 May 2013). The *Journal of the History of Collections* was co-founded by Arthur MacGregor.

[4] Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, ' "Studied for Action": How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy', *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78; Richard Yeo, 'Reading Encyclopedias: Science and the Organization of Knowledge in British Dictionaries of Arts and Sciences, 1730–1850', *Isis* 82 (1991): 24–49; Ann Blair, 'Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 541–51; Helmut Zedelmaier, *Bibliotheca Universalis und Bibliotheca Selecta: Das Problem der Ordnung des gelehrten Wissens in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 33 (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 1992).

[5] Konrad Gessner, *Pandectarum sive partitionum universalium Conradi Gesneri Tigurini, medici & philosophiae professoris, libri XXI* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1548):

107v–109r (Geography): Catalogue of the books printed in the shop of Aldus Manutius and other Venitian printers up to 1534.

117r–119v (History): Catalogue of the books printed at the shop of Sebastian Gryphius in Lyon.

165r–166v (*Artes Mechanicae*): Catalogue of the books printed at the shop of Christian Wechelius in Paris (with price list).

237r–238r (Metaphysics): Catalogue of the books printed at the shop of Johannes Gymnicus in Cologne, also with price list.

261r–v (Moral Philosophy): Catalogue of the books printed at the shop of Johannes Frellonius in Lyon.

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by contemporary authors and others were reprinted classics, but all were available for purchase. These foreign booklists became available to readers of Gessner's encyclopaedia, ready to create and help satisfy demands that could not have been supplied by the local book markets.

As today, scholars in the past used their collections for research: objects and notes served as preparation for methodical thinking and for writing. Published books and journal articles contained information that originated in notes taken from other books or letters. They described and played with content and organised newly gathered information from collected items. In many cases these books and articles were intended to present 'true belief' and thus to constitute what Plato defined as 'knowledge'—though he himself would not have accepted this claim.[6]

Due to past literary conventions, these histories have often remained hidden for centuries, to be excavated only in recent years. Sometimes the preparations for a particular book included formal experiments. Isaac Newton did not publish any collected data for his optical theories. His notebook, on the other hand, contains large amounts of data that he had collected from hundreds of experiments.[7] Reflecting on the discrepancy between the published and the unpublished work, Alan E. Shapiro hypothesised that Newton might have secretly constructed average results from his disparate findings, which he then used to formulate his theories. Even though this is a common method today, in Newton's time the construction of averages was not seen as methodologically appropriate.

Other experiments were based on collections of pharmaceutical, chemical and mineralogical objects. At the end of the sixteenth century, as Paula Findlen has shown, Ferrante Imperato, an apothecary in Naples, devoted parts of his collection to such objects.[8] Collections of minerals

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[6] Timothy Chappell, 'Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2011 Edition), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/plato-theaetetus (accessed 30 May 2013).

[7] See Alan E. Shapiro, 'Newton's Optical Notebooks: Public Versus Private Data', in *Reworking the Bench: Research Notebooks in the History of Science*, ed. by Frederic L. Holmes, Jürgen Renn and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, 43–66 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003). See also Jed Z. Buchwald and Mordechai Feingold, *Newton and the Origin of Civilization* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), passim.

[8] See Ferrante Imperato, *Dell'Historia Naturale* (Napoli, 1599). Paula Findlen, 'Die Zeit vor dem Laboratorium: Die Museen und der Bereich der Wissenschaft 1550–1750', in *Macrocosmos in Microcosmo: Die Welt in der Stube: Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450 bis 1800*, ed. by Andreas Grote, 192–207 (Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 1994), 198. For chemical collections in general, see Christoph Meinel, 'Chemical Collections', in *Spaces and Collections in the History of Science: The Laboratorio Chimico Overture*, 137–48 (Lisbon: Museum of Science of the University of Lisbon, 2009).

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were also subject to other sorts of experiment. Even today, scholars of mineralogy cut or scratch stones to check their consistency and identify them. In the process, the objects undergo change: over the long term, they lose parts of their substance.[9] In view of these different kinds of usage, it makes sense to look closely into the processes of collecting and discarding objects, books and notes in order to learn more about how knowledge is generated. Only recently have scholars in different disciplines begun to study this process on both levels, that of text and that of object. Our volume is one of the first outcomes of this ongoing interdisciplinary exchange.

In contrast to gathering and hording, the term 'collecting', as defined by current research, refers to an action that imposes an order or a concept on the objects that a collector has assembled. Although some actual collections seem at first glance to be confusing and unorganised—much like the unused furniture we find in attics and other storage spaces—these early object collections and notebooks were in many cases organised by elaborate criteria and more or less advanced taxonomies. Also, collectors often kept their objects or notes in one or more confined spaces, each with different functions. Sometimes the precise location of objects within defined spaces served as an aid for memorizing their content, as in the wooden walk-in model of a Roman theatre that Giulio Camillo Delminio showed in Venice in 1532 and later in Paris. He installed images—which he called 'corporeal signs'—within the space of the theatre. They were supposed to represent 'all things the human mind can conceive' and to lay out their abstract concepts with immediate lucidity to the eye of the beholder.[10]

Individual organisation principles have been recorded for all kinds of collections, including late medieval and early modern encyclopaedias, the widely influential criteria for commonplace books that Erasmus of Rotterdam laid out in *De Copia* in 1512,[11] and the natural history collections that emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century.[12] A substantial

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[9] We wish to thank Dr. Susanne Herting-Agthe, curator of the mineralogical collections at the Technische Universität Berlin, for providing important insights into the scholarly uses of the university collection.

[10] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 129–172.

[11] Reference is made to the second edition: Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, *De Copia*, 2nd ed. (Strasbourg, 1513).

[12] See, for the field of botanics, John Ray, *Methodus Plantarum nova, Brevitatis et Perspicuitatis causa Synoptice in Tabulis exhibita* (London: Fairborne, 1682); Augustus Quirinus

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body of literature now exists on the criteria that were meant to serve as organising principles. *The Journal of the History of Collections* has played a pivotal role in this research movement. The bibliography at the end of this volume gives an overview of the books and articles that might be helpful for further research.

This volume covers collections of texts and objects: libraries, textbooks that derive directly from commonplace books, miscellanies, commonplace books, data collections pertaining to historical events, encyclopaedias, royal and ducal treasures, curiosity cabinets, galleries and museums. The studies focus on ruptures and address a number of issues. If collectors discarded objects from their collections, what effect did this have on the generation of knowledge? What was kept, what was discarded? In many places, we had to broaden the notion of how knowledge was generated. Many cases appear in the twilight between bright public display and the dark shadows of the waste basket: content is specially stored or hidden away; content is only indexed; content is not exhibited or is locked in storage waiting to be released by future scholars with new outlooks; content is consumed by experiments. Today's collections reveal the results of an interesting, often serendipitous and mostly quite random process of gathering and selecting. The assembly of examples discussed in this volume brings some of the ruptures and gaps in collections and their causes.

War is the destructive event cited most often. Wars have damaged or destroyed a vast number of collectibles, from antiquity to the present. The legendary library of Alexandria is seen as the first collected treasury of knowledge in Western history. The ancient historiographer Plutarch gives one of a handful of contradictory opinions on what might have caused its destruction. According to Plutarch, Julius Caesar burnt down the library by accident in 48 BC, in the middle of the Alexandrian war.[13] Since this legendary beginning, many other cases of war damage have followed, including the partial destruction of royal treasures.

As a result of the disruptions caused by wars, sources for knowledge have also been transferred: significant parts of governmental collections moved into the treasure halls of the winning party. There are many

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Rivinus, *Ordo Plantarum quae sunt Flore irregulari monopetalo* (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1690); Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *Elemens de Botanique ou Methode pour connoître les Plantes* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1694).

[13] See: Luciano Canfora, *The Vanished Library: A Wonder of the Ancient World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 68. The Plutarch episode refers to Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*, 49.6 (here: Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, vol. 7, Loeb Classical Library Edition [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919], 561).

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examples of great importance still in place. In his 1995 article 'From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200–1750' Anthony Cutler assumes that all of us today, as post-colonial readers, tend to interpret the church of San Marco in Venice as a vast repository of Byzantine booty, taken from the captured Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade of 1202–1204.[14] In 1631, during the Thirty Years' War, the Lutheran warrior king Gustav Adolf II of Sweden conquered the Catholic town of Wurzburg, which was governed at the time by prince-bishop Franz von Hatzfeld. He took cartloads of books from the Bibliotheca Academica Godefridiana, the university library of Wurzburg, back to Uppsala in Sweden. In Uppsala, these books contributed to the foundation of the new Uppsala university library and thus had an impact on Swedish scholarly culture.[15] Very recently, Bénédicte Savoy published a volume about pillaged collections during the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon confiscated treasures from royal collections all over Europe and Egypt, had them brought to Paris and displayed them in the Louvre. Savoy emphasised that this had major effects on the spread of knowledge. A social group that hitherto did not have access to these treasures was now able to see them: the people of Paris.[16]

Other collections have been broken up by pillage. This happened, for example, during the American Civil War between 1863 and 1865. Joan E. Cashin gives a summary in her article 'Trophies of War: Material Culture in the Civil War Era' (2011):

> The war generated a massive traffic in objects, and it transformed the material culture of the entire country, prompting the redistribution of millions of objects. Many actors were involved—soldiers, civilians, men, women, northerners, southerners—in getting, giving, relinquishing, buying, selling, and keeping these objects, and they acted with a multitude of motives. Soldiers and civilians in both regions used the words 'trophy,' 'relic,' 'souvenir,' and 'artifact' interchangeably to describe objects taken during the War. Their behavior reveals a timeless fascination with objects, which in turn convey a multitude of cultural messages that are not always easy to say with words.[17]

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[14] Anthony Cutler, 'From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200–1750', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 237–267.

[15] See http://www.ub.uu.se/en/about-the-library/history-of-the-library (accessed 30 May 2013).

[16] Bénédicte Savoy, with Tom Heithoff and Nicolas Labasque, *Kunstraub: Napoleons Konfiszierungen in Deutschland und die Europäischen Folgen; mit einem Katalog der Kunstwerke aus deutschen Sammlungen im Musée Napoléon* (Vienna et al.: Böhlau, 2011), 337–380.

[17] Joan E. Cashin, 'Trophies of War: Material Culture in the Civil War Era', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (2011): 339–367, here 339.

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Lawrence Rothfield reveals in his book on the recent looting of the Iraq museum yet more motives behind the destruction and plundering of objects:[18] groups 'liberated' themselves from symbols of authority that they felt were not part of their heritage; individuals, by contrast, were in it for the money: they took objects simply in order to sell them.

There is also a fourth outcome. During the Second World War in Germany, the best pieces in national collections and state-controlled libraries were often removed to places of safety, especially after 1942. When the storage places were in what became Poland or the Czech Republic after the war, those countries normally did not return the treasures. In 1942, the German Teacher's Library of Berlin had an amazing collection of 6,178 pedagogical manuscripts and 2,678 portraits and coins,[19] among them compositions by famous educationalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Adolf Diesterweg. In 1943 and 1944 the responsible library director, Hanns Beckmann, transferred the most valuable pieces to a safe place in what is today the Czech Republic. After the war, the manuscript collection was left with only 1,300 items, while the coins and portraits were gone.[20]

Considerations of taste and value shape choices and re-evaluations. The second most frequently cited factor in the transformation of collections is only partly an outside force; it is far more a response by the collector himself. Collectors change their minds, or one collector is replaced by another, and a new owner administers the old collection based on very different principles. Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682) has pointed out errors in all fields of knowledge, and gathered them in one book, his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries Into very many Received Tenents And commonly presumed Truths* (London 1646 and a few later enhanced editions).[21] One very important example of changing values is evident in shifting opinions about copies and originals. In 1587 Gabriel Kaltemarckt, an artist who is rather obscure today, advised the elector Christian I of Saxony on how to form the curiosity cabinet in Dresden. His treatise is one of the very few systematic plans for curiosity cabinets preserved from

[18] See Lawrence Rothfield, *The Rape of Mesopotamia: Behind the Looting of the Iraq Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[19] Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF), Archive, 1.0.08, 41.

[20] See Christian Ritzi, 'Vom Freikorps-Kämpfer zum Bibliotheksdirektor: zur Bibliographie von Hanns Beckmann, Leiter der Deutschen Lehrerbücherei 1942–1944', in Wege des Wissens: 125 Jahre Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung, ed. Christian Ritzi, 61–92 (Berlin: Weidler, 2001).

[21] <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/pseudodoxia/pseudodoxia.shtml>; access June 7, 2013.

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the sixteenth century. Rather than advocating the purchase of second-rate originals of Renaissance sculpture, Kaltemarckt encouraged the elector to buy cast copies of important statues.[22] The assessment shows that the artist coded value into canonical works of art. By contrast, twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature on art expresses a clear preference for the originals, even when they are by unknown and obscure artists.[23]

Three hundred and fifty years later, the renowned Austrian author and collector of manuscripts, Stefan Zweig, published the article 'Manuscripts as Documents of Creation' ('Handschriften als schöpferische Dokumente') in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of 7 November 1926. In it he explains what drove him to collect other authors' and music composers' handwritten drafts: he wanted to capture the creative process underlying already published works. He valued the manuscripts as original expressions of this struggle:

> What will later in the published book become a mere spiritual reproduction retains a breathing, sensuous and personal form in the written manuscript: a mad poem by Hölderlin with its spinning crossover lines, a page of sketches by Beethoven with lines angrily clinging together, which furiously stumble after the flying inspiration, the sign provided by verses of Goethe, round and careful, almost painted, with their big lines, allow me to sense in an almost magical way the creative character of their genius. In my view, such sheets can be seen as portraits and, indeed, full of personality.[24]

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[22] Barbara Gutfleisch and Joachim Menzhausen, '"How a Kunstkammer Should Be Formed": Gabriel Kaltemarckt's Advice to Christian I of Saxony on the Formation of an Art Collection, 1587', *Journal of the History of Collections* 1 (1989), 3–32.

[23] The recently published collection edited by Tatjana Bartsch, Marcus Becker, Horst Bredekamp and Charlotte Schreiter, *Das Originale der Kopie: Kopien als Produkte und Medien der Transformation von Antike*, Transformationen der Antike 17 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), is devoted to one of the major problems of re-evaluating the relations between copies and originals in art history. Its focus is on early modern copies of antique sculptures. The authors believe that these copies might have had a transcending status and that they come to stand between the traditional roles of reproductive copies and originals by helping to give birth to expressions of new compositions, ideas and thoughts. The authors show that they value originals more highly than any kind of reproduction, and by elevating the status of early modern copies of antique statues, they narrow the distance between this new group and that of the originals.

[24] Stefan Zweig, 'Handschriften als Schöpferische Dokumente', in *Ich kenne den Zauber der Schrift: Katalog und Geschichte der Autographensammlung Stefan Zweig: Mit kommentiertem Abdruck von Stefan Zweigs Aufsätzen über das Sammeln von Handschriften*, *Katalog / Antiquariat Inlibris*, ed. Oliver Matuschek (Vienna: Inlibris, 2005), 117: 'Was später im gedruckten Buch rein geistige Wiedergabe wird, hat in dem geschriebenen Manuskript noch atmende, sinnliche und ganz persönliche Form: ein Wahnsinnsgedicht Hölderlins mit seinen wirr durcheinanderfahrenden Zeilen, ein Skizzenblatt Beethovens mit den zornig hingehauenen, der fliegenden Inspiration wütig nachstolpernden Zeichen, ein rund und besonnen, mit ausladenden großen Linien beinahe gemalter Vers Goethes lassen

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The collection that is most associated with the condensation of information into a basic canon of knowledge is the encyclopaedia. We use the term 'encyclopaedia' in this volume in the sense formulated by Richard Yeo in 2001[25] since the term itself was used only very rarely before 1732. We believe that Konrad Gessner's *De piscibus et aquatilibus omnibus libelli III novi* (1556), Johann Heinrich Alsted's *Cursus Philosophici Encyclopaedia* (1620), and Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–1772) have certain features in common: they are collections of lemmata with their explanations drawn from other sources (books, observations, testimonies). The collection should contain all known subjects belonging to the general theme of the work. It stores written and illustrated entries, usually in alphabetical order, sometimes reduced to specific topics such as disciplines at university or school. From the beginning these eclectic compilations contained pieces by more than one author, though they were often used as authoritative reference books.[26] A very important form of knowledge reduction was then to abridge an encyclopedia into an extract, a short epitome. Such abridgements were often simplified and aimed at youth or women.[27] In this volume, Iolanda Ventura, Jürgen Leonhardt, Ulrich Marzolph, Marc Winter and Monika Wicki show for the Middle Ages, early modern times and the twentieth century that the evolution of encyclopaedias in all three periods was long and complex. When disciplinary canons were not yet formed, or when they were transformed, as happened between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries in Europe, individual authors such as Konrad Gessner took the lead, and their textbooks at times deployed an even greater range of source materials than encyclopaedias, as the articles by Jürgen Oelkers, Paul Michel and Anja-Silvia Goeing reveal.

Already in medieval times, historians confronted the problem of compiling data into readable narratives (Gerald Schwedler, Anthony Grafton). Translating an object collection into a printed picture gallery was also a

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mich gleichsam magisch die schöpferische Wesensart ihres Genius empfinden; ich vermag solche Blätter wie Bildnisse und als durchaus seelenhafte zu betrachten.'

[25] See Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–32.

[26] The term 'reference book' is used as broadly, as in Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 1–10.

[27] The technique, how early modern encyclopedias were abridged and epitomized to about one third of the original text, could be studied by scrutinizing the extract *Auszug aus des J. G. Krünitz ökonomisch-technologischer Encyclopädie*, edited by M.C. v. Schütz, Johann Ludolf Graßmann et al. 34 vols. Berlin: Pauli, 1786–1830.

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challenge, as Livia Cardenas shows by tracing a collection of relics to the early years of the Reformation in Germany.

Taste embraces both material and display. As Krzysztof Pomian has written,[28] from the start the idea of exhibition was connected with collecting. A combination of motives leads collectors to store and hide away their objects in places that are not easy to inspect; another combination of motives leads them to get rid of things, by exchanging or discarding them. In some cases, they wish both to make a careful choice of objects and to restrict the audience. But the need for a simple spatial organisation can also play an important role, as Laurence Brockliss shows in his piece on the private coin collection of the Parisian scholar Esprit Calvet. Finally, the fate of institutionalised collections, whether at museums or libraries, seems to vary according to different political and commercial needs (Steven Conn), different storage practices (François de Capitani) or different wartime emergencies (Nicola Schneider).

Wars and collectors' choices are only the most obvious manifestation of the changes that have been wrought on collections and led to their formation, their transformation, their interpretation in terms of established beliefs and their dissolution. Many other issues interact with these larger ones. Outside forces and individual choices have in many cases been interconnected and are revealed only by scrutinising specific individual cases. The following collection of essays opens a new window on the history of learning, as seen from the perspective of collections and collectors.

[28] Krzysztof Pomian, 'Entre l'invisible et le visible: la collection', in *Collectionneurs, Amateurs et Curieux: Paris, Venise: XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle*, 15–37 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). The essay was first published in Torino, Italian by Einaudi in 1978.

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